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ABSTRACT

Approximately 1820 high school seniors from 14 schools in Georgia were surveyed to determine their attitudes toward five areas of the social studies: economics, geography, government, history, and psychology/sociology. Results indicated that economics was selected as the least-liked subject area more often than any other social studies area. In relation to the subject area selected as the most liked, students chose economics below history and psychology/sociology but higher than geography and government. College-bound students expressed a less favorable attitude toward economics than did seniors who did not plan to attend college. No gender differences were found in relation to economics being the least liked subject area. However, a significantly larger number of females chose economics as being most liked than did males. (RM)

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Gender Differences in Attitude Toward Economics

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Introduction

Although there have been a number of studies in relationship to students' gender and the students' knowledge of economics, especially on the college level, there have been few studies concerning students' gender and the interest students have in economics. The few studies which have been reported on differences in the students' gender and their interest in economics have concerned college students.

In regard to students' gender and knowledge of economics, Davidson and Kilgore's (1971) study found no sex-related differences in the stock of economic understanding of the elementary student. Both Moyer and Paden (1968) and Thornton and Vredveld (1977) reported a gender difference in favor of males in students' understanding of economics on the secondary school level. However, Hahn (1982) found no significant gender difference in regard to economic knowledge among high school seniors. Reporting on a number of studies concerning gender difference and economic knowledge, Siegfried (1979) concluded that on the college level, the greater evidence of gender difference was in studies

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which found college males had a greater knowledge of economics than did college females.

Two studies, Allison (1976) and Kelly (1972) reported that female college students tended to like economics better than did college males. Allison found that even though females understood less economics than did males, the females expressed a greater enjoyment of the principles-of-economics course. Other studies such as Wentworth and Lewis (1975) and Paden and Moyer (1969) found no gender difference in regard to attitude toward economics.

Study Design

In order to determine high school seniors' attitude toward five areas of the social studies (economics, geography, government, history and psychology/sociology) in the spring of 1985 a survey instrument was completed by 1,820 high school seniors in fourteen secondary schools in the northwest quadrangle of Georgia (from just south of Chattanooga, Tennessee, to fifty miles south of Atlanta and including the metropolitan Atlanta area). Various types of high schools were included such

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as the largest high school in Georgia, an inner-city high school, suburban schools, comprehensive rural-small city schools and small rural schools. All of these high school seniors had had at least one economics course somewhere in their senior high school education.

The high school seniors were asked to select the one subject area from the five social studies subject areas that they liked most and the one subject area they liked least. Table I gives the results of the students' choices.

From Table I, it may be seen that twice as many students chose history and the behavioral science area of psychology/sociology as their most liked subject as chose economics as their most liked subject. Economics did rank above government and geography as being chosen as students' most liked subject. However, when students' choice of their leat liked subject is considered, economics was selected as the least liked subject area more often than any other social studies area.

The students were also asked to respond to the question of whether or not they planned to attend college during the next year. Of the 1,820 students surveyed, 1,200 indicated they planned to attend college

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while 620 students said they did not plan to attend college. Table II gives information in regard to students' plans to attend college and their selection of courses as the most liked and least liked subject areas. From this information, it may be seen that those who do not plan to attend college view economics more favorable than do those who plan to attend college. To determine if there were significant differences in relationship to plans for attending or not attending college and economics being the most liked or least liked subject area, chi squares were computed. For those students who selected economics as their most liked subject area, a chi square of 8.527 was computed for differences in those who planned to attend college and those who did not plan to attend. This chi square was significant at the .01 level which showed that a significantly larger number of non-college bound students indicated that economics was their most liked subject than did those who planned to attend college. A similar chi square was computed for those students who indicated economics was their least liked subject area. The chi square of 6.001 was significant at the .05 level which showed a larger number of college-bound students indicated economics was

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their least liked subject than did those who did not plan to attend college.

A third set of information was obtained from the students, the student's gender. Of the 277 students who selected economics as the most liked subject area, 122 (44.0%) were males and 155 (56.0%) were females. Of the 466 students who selected economics as the least liked subject, 245 (52.6%) were male and 221 (47.4%) were female. Chi squares were computed to determine if there were significant gender differences for each of these two groups of students in regard to their likes of economics. For those students who selected economics as the most liked subject, the chi square was 4.0476, which was significant at the .05 level. For those selecting economics as the least liked subject, the chi square was 1.236 which was not significant at the .05 level. Only among those students who indicated that economics was the most liked subject was a significant gender difference found. Females indicated a greater like for economics than did males.

Discussion

Three findings concening high school seniors' likes or dislikes for economics were found in the study.

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When compared with the other four areas of the high school's social studies curriculum, more students chose economics as their least liked subject area than they chose any other social studies subject area. In relation to the subject area selected as the most liked, these students chose economics below history and the behavioral science area of psychology/sociology but higher than geography and government. No conclusion can be definitely formulated as to why students have this somewhat less favorable attitude toward economics. Possibly one reason is that many of the students' social studies teachers had little depth education in economics. Many of these social studies teachers had more depth education in history, which was viewed more favorable. Hopefully as high school economics courses are taught by teachers with a greater depth knowledge in economics, students will have a more positive attitude toward economics.

When high school seniors who planned to attend college were compared with seniors who did not plan to attend college in relation to their attitude toward economics, the college bound student expressed a less favorable attitude toward economics. No explanation for this difference is offered. However, it is gratifying

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that those students who terminate their formal education at the end of their high school years expressed a relatively more favorable viewpoint toward economics. Many of the college bound students will gain more knowledge of economics in college. Hopefully the study indicated that the terminal students feel they have gained enough economic knowledge to help them to become functional citizens and consumers.

When students' gender was compared with students' attitude toward economics, no gender difference was found in relation to economics being the least liked subject area. However, when students' choice of economics as being the most liked subject area was compared with gender, a significantly larger number of females chose economics as being most liked than did males. This more favorable attitude of females toward economics is in line with Allison's findings. It does not necessarily refute the many studies which find males have a greater knowledge of economics than do females. Allison's findings found that the female students of her study who expressed a more favorable attitude toward economics than did males had less economic knowledge than did the males. Although this study made no attempt to measure economic knowledge, it possibly shows that a

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more favorable attitude by females to economics may begin on the high school level.

Even though the study involved a rather large number of high school seniors from varied types of high schools, caution must be used in generalizing from the findings of the study. However, in planning economics curriculum and the education of economics teachers, any knowledge of students' attitude toward economics should give insight which would aid in this curriculum planning and teacher education programs.

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Table I

Social Studies Subject Area Selected
As Most Liked and Least Liked

Subject	Most Liked		Least Liked	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Economics	277	15.2	466	25.6
Geography	149	8.2	407	22.4
Government	253	13.9	363	19.9
History	581	31.9	328	18.0
Psychology/ Sociology	560	30.8	257	14.1

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Table II

Social Studies Subject Area Selected
As Most Liked and Least Liked
According to Students Plans to Attend College

	Most Liked		Least Liked	
Subject	Attend College	Not Attend College	Attend College	Not Attend College
Economics	162 (13.5%)	115 (18.6%)	436 (36.3%)	120 (19.4%)
Geography	90 (7.5%)	94 (9.5%)	272 (22.7%)	135 (21.8%)
Government	133 (13.3%)	94 (15.2%)	227 (18.9%)	135 (21.8%)
History	368 (31.0%)	213 (34.4%)	205 (17.1%)	123 (19.8%)
Psychology/ Sociology	421 (35.1%)	139 (22.4%)	151 (12.6%)	106 (17.1%)

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